Globe and Mail
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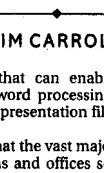
StarOffice supplies software suite option

These days, documents and files are regularly exchanged through the Internet. It has become almost de rigueur to have



E-BIZ

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software that can enable you to read the word processing, spreadsheet and presentation files you are sent.

Given that the vast majority of organizations and offices seem to be using Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint software, most small businesses have at least one or more of these programs.

But they don't come cheap. A new version of Microsoft Word 97 or Word 2000 will run you $400 or more, while a suite of programs can cost more than $600. To upgrade to the latest versions takes at least at several hundred dollars. This can be quite a bit of money for a small business to pay.

Alternatives do exist, most notably the word processing program WordPerfect, which remains at the cutting edge in terms of features and can save documents in various Microsoft formats.

Another option on the horizon may be of particular interest to small businesses.

StarOffice is a software suite that contains word processing, spreadsheet and presentation programs as well as many other features including E-mail. It's available in many languages, including English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portugese, Swedish and Dutch.

If you know how to use Word or other such software, you'll know how to use this program. The word processor can save files in Word 97 format, for example, that can be read later directly in Microsoft Word, should you have to. And the learning curve can be just about nil.

But the real benefit is the price. You can download a complete version of the program for non-commercial use from the StarOffice Web site to try it out (**www.stardivision.com**). Make sure, though, that you have a high-speed Internet connection: it is 62 megabytes in size.

If you can't do that, you can order a personal edition through the Internet for $40 (U.S.). If you do like it and plan on using it for business purposes, you can buy it for $169 — still big savings over the alternatives.

California-based Star Division Software Corp. says that within weeks of the program's availability on the Internet, about 600,000 people had downloaded the trial version of the program. You can use it on Windows systems, as well as on a variety of Unix platforms including Linux.

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